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Item 26 of the provisional agenda

THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION TO MILITARY SERVICE

Written statement submitted by Pax Christi International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[19 December 1994]

Conscientious objection: Pax Christi and the right to refuse to kill

1. 1995 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Second World War and the end of the Holocaust; it marks the beginning of the nuclear age with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; it marks the founding of the United Nations. 1995 also marks the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of a Catholic peace organization for the reconciliation of former enemies and for Gospel peace-making in the world, Pax Christi International.

2. In December 1965, the Catholic bishops of the world, at Vatican II, affirmed the right of conscientious objection to military service in the Pastoral Constitution, "The Church in the Modern World".

3. On 10 March 1987, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights adopted by a large majority resolution 1987/46 in which it "[appealed] to States to recognize that conscientious objection to military service should be considered a legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights".

4. Pax Christi has made several interventions at the Commission on the issue of conscientious objection. In March 1993, the representatives of Pax Christi spoke in support of a clarifying resolution regarding conscientious objection. The adding of conscientious objection to the agenda of the Commission arose from the written and spoken interventions of the representative of a Catholic non-governmental organization in consultative status.

5. We note that at its fifty-first session the Commission will examine the question of conscientious objection on the basis of comments provided by Governments. As an NGO, Pax Christi will supply comments on the question received from its national sections in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas and Australia.

6. Pax Christi strongly supports Commission resolution 1993/84 of 10 March 1993 on conscientious objection to military service, and asks that the Commission give special consideration to the following points:

(a) Objectors who reach their position during military service should be released into alternative service under civilian control. This should apply to objectors in a volunteer army;

(b) In conflicts, especially those involving ethnic and religious issues, unwilling conscripts whose convictions are opposed to war and killing should be accorded asylum and safe transit to another State or area;

(c) Alternative civilian service should not be punitive in nature nor longer than the term of military service;

(d) Persons who have been recognized by their Governments as conscientious objectors should, when qualified, be eligible for works of peace in such specialized agencies as UNHCR, UNICEF, UNEP, etc.

7. The question of conscientious objection is attached to the item, "The role of youth in the promotion and protection of human rights". Youth will be motivated to respect human rights when their own human rights are respected. One right claimed by more and more young people in this bloodstained century is the right to refuse to kill.

8. Christians who refuse to kill find their inspiration in Jesus who accepted suffering and refused retaliation and who taught in the Sermon on the Mount to forgive injuries and love the enemy. Aware that the disarmament programmes of Governments proceed slowly, young people choose personal disarmament, the disarmament of the heart.

9. A United Nations agency reminds us that the war begins in the minds of human beings. Peace, too, begins in the minds and hearts of human beings. Young people, passionately committed to the United Nations aim of a warless world, refuse to be a part of the enterprise of war aimed at injuring and killing human beings and destroying their homes and livelihoods. Their refusal, as conscientious objectors to military service, shows them as a prophetic vanguard of world peace.